



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
Bureau of the Census
Washington, DC 20233-0001

MASTER FILE

JUN 08 2000

DSSD CENSUS 2000 PROCEDURES AND OPERATIONS MEMORANDUM SERIES #N-5

MEMORANDUM FOR

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Attention:

Management Training Branch
Field Division

From:

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Subject:

Observation of Update/Enumerate
Palm Springs, CA
April 13-14, 2000

I Introduction

I visited the Palm Springs Local Census Office (LCO) on April 13-14, 2000, to observe the Update /Enumerate (U/E) operation in areas thought to have high rates of Hispanic populations. I also spoke with the Questionnaire Assistance clerks in the LCO, and the Assistant Manager for Field Operations (AMFO) about his use of the "1990 Data for Census 2000 Planning."

II Description of Enumeration Area/Environment

The Local Census Office Manager (LCOM) wanted me to accompany an enumerator to an area that was near a reservation and supposedly had a high Hispanic concentration. The area was about an hour and a half from Palm Springs, near the Salton Sea. It appeared to be an area with many migrant workers and farmers. The specific assessment area where I observed was in a fairly old trailer park with seasonal and retirement households. Other areas I visited were mostly migrant worker trailer parks.

I had originally requested to visit areas with high Hispanic concentrations to get a better idea of how these populations dealt with the census response process. The LCOM arranged this in an area thought to have this population, but it was not until a couple of days before I arrived that it was discovered that the area was mostly seasonal and retirement households. Plans had already been made for me to accompany enumerators.

I was sent out with the Field Operations Supervisor (FOS), and a Spanish-speaking enumerator. The next day I was also sent out with an FOS and a Spanish-speaking enumerator. I would have preferred to only accompany the enumerator. It is a little cumbersome and somewhat overwhelming to go from house to house with three people.

We visited an elderly respondent, and while she was very responsive and cooperative, it was difficult for the enumerator to communicate with her. Her English was not very good, and the FOS did not step in as much as I thought he would. Further, she spoke with such a soft voice that the long form took longer than necessary to be filled out.

II General Observations Related to The Enumerator's Preparedness/Knowledge of Census Concepts

I was impressed with both Spanish-speaking enumerators and both FOSs I accompanied. They were prepared to answer questions and concerns from the respondents. However, on the first day, both the enumerator and the FOS had forgotten the Privacy Act Notice. They decided that since it had taken us over an hour to reach the assignment area, that they would not use the notice. They made sure to inform the respondents of the confidential nature of the interviews.

Rather than carry the bulky binder with them, the enumerators took a few forms at a time and went from house to house. In my opinion, this allowed them to be less intimidating to respondents.

IV General Observations Related to the Enumerator's Interviewing Skills

As I mentioned above, there were some interviewing problems that arose because of language barriers and audibility. The first day, the FOS did most of the door approaches, and I noticed that he did not read from the verbatim instructions, but he got the job done. He covered all important points of the door approach, but he was able to do it with a personality and a candor that helped establish a better rapport with the respondents. For instance, at one particular home, we walked up, and he said "Howdy, we're with the census, and we're here to count ya!" The respondent smiled and was willing to participate.

During the second day of field work, we were mostly verifying assignment areas, so I did not have an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of the interviewers. We were sent to determine whether a few areas had been missed from the assignment areas. The Partnership Specialist had heard about many people that had not heard anything about the census, and the LCOM sent us to doublecheck to make sure the areas were included. At one trailer park, which had mostly Spanish-speaking people, the enumerator helped some respondents fill out their forms that they had received during an Update/Leave operation. The respondents were anxious to participate, but they did not understand the form. The Spanish-speaking enumerator effectively obtained the necessary information.

IV. General Observations Related to the Interviewer's Attitude about the Work

I felt that all the enumerators with whom I worked had a positive attitude about the census in general, about the importance of it, and about the need to keep information confidential. It was apparent through conversations with the enumerators and the LCO staff that they had taken somewhat of a hit in the morale department because of the heightened news about the long form and privacy issues in the media. One of them even mentioned that this was due in part to people seen as "part of the system" having major problems with the census. My impression is that this somewhat affected the interviewer's ability to give extra effort to solicit responses to some of the long form questions.

I spoke with many of the LCO Quality Assurance (QA) staff, and they expressed some frustration with some enumerators who apparently did not follow instructions on the interview summary section of the form. The QA staff had to correct much of the summary information. For instance, there was disagreement between questions A and B: "Status on April 1, 2000," and "POP on April 1, 2000."

VI. Discussion with the Assistant Manager for Field Operations (AMFO)

I spent some time with the AMFO to discuss his use of the "1990 Data for Census 2000 Planning." He had used it quite extensively. He purchased a 1996 street map showing census tracts, and listed place locators for each of the Hard-to-Enumerate (HTE) tracts so that his staff could more easily identify the tracts. He sorted on the different HTE variables and submitted plans to deal with barriers to enumeration. He also met with the local police departments and had them identify areas that were high concentrations of gangs, drug houses and other issues that might pose a threat to the enumerators. They recruited bilingual enumerators based on the information from the database. The AMFO was pleased with the database and found it very useful.

VIII. Summary

The interviewers and office staff with whom I spoke and observed appeared to be well-trained, enthusiastic, and eager to get the job done.

VII. Recommendations

I recommend that observers in the future make it clear they prefer to accompany an enumerator alone, to the extent possible.

cc:

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